

THE GENESIS OF MACAULAY'S HISTORY

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supersede the last fashionable novel on the tables of young ladies.¹

It would be unfair to take too literally the words of a casual letter to a friend, but it looks a little as if Macaulay made knowledge of history to consist in remembering a list of names, and the aim of history the production of an entertaining story. One thinks of the remark of Anatole France defining history as 'une espece de roman a Tusage des esprits avises et curieux'.

Macaulay's progress was slow. The ability to concentrate himself entirely upon his subject was the first thing he demanded : an interruption by other business was fatal, even if that other business was also historical or literary.

There are people who can carry on twenty works at a time. Southey would write the History of Brazil before breakfast, an ode after breakfast, then the History of the Peninsular War till dinner, and an article for the Quarterly Review in the evening. But I am of a different temper. I never write to please myself until my subject has for the time driven every other out of my head. When I turn from one work to another, a great deal of time is lost in the mere transition.²

Not only business or social distractions prevented him from the necessary concentration of thought, but the political news of the day diverted his attention, and some-

times so absorbed it that he could not fix his
mind upon his
task.

' Horrible news from India; massacre of
Europeans at
Delhi, and mutiny. I have no apprehensions
for our
Indian Empire ; but this is a frightful
event. Home ;
but had no heart to work. I will not try at
present/ Again

¹ Letter to Napier, Nov. 5, 1841. Ibid. pp. 103-4.

² Letter to Napier, Jan. 18, 1843. Ibid. p. 126.